

woburn abbey and gardens

Woburn Abbey and Gardens

Woburn Abbey and its sprawling gardens represent a quintessential example of British aristocratic heritage, blending centuries of history, art, architecture, and horticulture into a single captivating estate. Located in Bedfordshire, England, this historic house and its extensive grounds have attracted visitors for centuries, offering a unique window into the lifestyle of the British nobility, as well as providing breathtaking scenery and meticulously curated gardens. The estate is not only a symbol of aristocratic grandeur but also a vibrant cultural hub, hosting exhibitions, events, and conservation projects. In this article, we will explore the rich history of Woburn Abbey, delve into its architectural marvels, and take a detailed tour of its famous gardens and attractions.

History of Woburn Abbey

Origins and Early History

Woburn Abbey's roots extend back to the 12th century when the land was originally granted to the Augustinian monks of Woburn Priory. The priory was established around 1145 and served as a religious center for several centuries. The name "Woburn" is believed to derive from the Old English words "wiburn," meaning "wicker hill," indicative of the area's landscape.

In the 16th century, during the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII, the priory was dissolved, and the estate was confiscated by the Crown. It then passed into private hands, setting the stage for its transformation into a noble residence.

Transformation into a Country Estate

In the early 17th century, Sir John Temple, a lawyer and politician, acquired the estate. Over the following centuries, successive owners expanded and remodeled the property, reflecting evolving architectural styles. The Temple family held the estate until 1694, after which it was purchased by the Duke of Bedford's family, the Russells, who have owned it ever since.

The Russells undertook significant renovations, transforming the medieval structure into the elegant country house that visitors see today. The 19th century saw further expansion, including the addition of grand wings and a neo-Classical façade designed by architect Sir John Soane, who contributed to the estate's distinctive appearance.

Woburn Abbey as a Working Estate and Cultural

Institution

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, Woburn Abbey evolved into a working estate, with agricultural innovations and land management practices. The estate also became a center for art and culture, housing extensive art collections, including works from renowned painters and sculptures.

In the 20th century, faced with the financial demands of maintaining such an extensive property, the family began opening parts of the estate to the public. Today, Woburn Abbey functions as both a private residence and a major tourist attraction, hosting exhibitions, events, and conservation initiatives.

Architectural Features of Woburn Abbey

Exterior Architecture

The exterior of Woburn Abbey reflects its historical evolution, showcasing a blend of architectural styles. The façade features a classical design with symmetrical facades, grand columns, and elaborate stonework. The neo-Classical elements, introduced by Sir John Soane, lend the building an imposing yet elegant presence.

Key architectural highlights include:

- The grand entrance hall with its impressive portico.
- The ornate windows and balustrades.
- The expansive lawns and stately drives leading up to the main building.

Interior Highlights

Inside, Woburn Abbey is a treasure trove of art, antiques, and historic furnishings. Notable features include:

- The Long Library: housing thousands of books and historic manuscripts.
- The State Rooms: lavishly decorated with period furniture, paintings, and decorative arts.
- The Portrait Gallery: displaying portraits of the Russell family and other notable figures.
- The Chapel: a serene space with historic stained glass windows and religious artifacts.

The interiors are preserved meticulously, offering visitors an immersive experience into aristocratic life over several centuries.

The Gardens and Grounds of Woburn Abbey

The Importance of Gardens at Woburn Abbey

The gardens and grounds of Woburn Abbey are integral to its charm and historical significance. Designed over centuries, the gardens combine formal landscaping, naturalistic woodland, and themed attractions. They serve as a testament to British horticultural artistry and are recognized nationally for their beauty and diversity.

Design and Layout

The estate covers approximately 3,000 acres, featuring:

- Formal gardens with symmetrical parterres.
- The Italian Garden, with fountains and classical sculptures.
- The Wilderness, a large woodland area with walking trails.
- The Deer Park, home to herds of red and fallow deer.
- The Walled Garden, dedicated to seasonal displays and horticultural collections.

The gardens are designed to complement the architecture of the Abbey, creating a harmonious environment for visitors and wildlife alike.

Key Features and Attractions

- **The Italian Garden:** A beautifully manicured space with symmetrical flowerbeds, fountains, and statues inspired by classical Italy.
- **The Walled Garden:** An enclosed area dedicated to exotic plants, seasonal flowers, and vegetable plots, often used for educational purposes.
- **The Wilderness:** A naturalistic woodland area with walking trails, encouraging visitors to explore native flora and fauna.
- **The Deer Park:** One of the largest deer parks in England, providing a natural habitat and a scenic backdrop for the estate.
- **The Rose Garden:** An enchanting space bursting with a variety of roses, with peaceful seating areas for visitors to relax.

Activities and Attractions for Visitors

Guided Tours and Educational Programs

Visitors can participate in guided tours that explore the history, architecture, and art collections of Woburn Abbey. Educational programs are also available for school groups and horticulture enthusiasts, offering insights into estate management, conservation, and landscape design.

Events and Exhibitions

Throughout the year, Woburn Abbey hosts a variety of events, such as:

- Art exhibitions showcasing both historic and contemporary works.
- Garden festivals highlighting horticultural excellence.
- Classical music concerts in the grounds.
- Seasonal events like Christmas markets and outdoor theatre performances.

Wildlife and Nature Experiences

Nature lovers can enjoy:

- Birdwatching in the woodland and wetland areas.
- Walking and cycling trails through the extensive grounds.
- Participating in conservation projects aimed at preserving native species.

Shopping and Dining

The estate offers:

- Gift shops selling souvenirs, local produce, and garden accessories.
- Cafés and restaurants serving traditional British cuisine and afternoon teas.
- Themed shops selling gardening tools, books, and art reproductions.

Conservation and Future Developments

Heritage Preservation

Woburn Abbey is committed to preserving its historic architecture, art collections, and gardens. Conservation efforts include restoring historic interiors, maintaining the landscape, and digitizing archives for educational purposes.

Sustainable Practices

The estate is adopting sustainable practices such as:

- Organic gardening methods.
- Water conservation initiatives.
- Wildlife habitat enhancement.

Future Plans

Future developments focus on expanding visitor engagement through virtual tours, new exhibitions, and eco-friendly transportation options within the estate. The goal is to balance heritage conservation with modern tourism needs, ensuring Woburn Abbey remains a vital cultural and natural landmark for generations to come.

Conclusion

Woburn Abbey and Gardens stand as a testament to Britain's rich aristocratic heritage, blending architectural grandeur, artistic treasures, and horticultural excellence in a breathtaking landscape. Whether exploring its historic interiors, strolling through its meticulously designed gardens, or experiencing its vibrant cultural events, visitors are offered a multifaceted journey through history, art, and nature. As a living estate, Woburn Abbey continues to evolve, preserving its legacy while embracing sustainable and innovative practices to ensure its enduring appeal for future generations.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the opening hours for Woburn Abbey and Gardens?

Woburn Abbey and Gardens typically open from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM daily, but hours may vary seasonally or for special events. It's best to check their official website before planning your visit.

Are dogs allowed in Woburn Abbey and Gardens?

Dogs are permitted in the Gardens on a lead, but they are not allowed inside the Abbey itself. There are designated areas and nearby facilities where dogs are welcome.

What are the main attractions within Woburn Abbey and Gardens?

Visitors can explore the historic Abbey, the beautiful landscaped gardens, the Deer Park, the Woburn Safari Park nearby, and a variety of seasonal exhibitions and events throughout the year.

Is there a guided tour available at Woburn Abbey and Gardens?

Yes, guided tours are available, offering insights into the Abbey's history, architecture, and the extensive art collection. Self-guided audio tours are also provided for visitors who prefer exploring independently.

How much does it cost to visit Woburn Abbey and Gardens?

Admission prices vary depending on age and whether you visit the Gardens, Abbey, or both. Typically, adult tickets are around £20, with discounts for children, seniors, and family groups. Checking the official website provides the most current pricing.

Are there any special events or exhibitions at Woburn Abbey and Gardens?

Yes, Woburn hosts seasonal events such as garden festivals, outdoor theatre performances, and historical exhibitions. It's recommended to check their event calendar before your visit.

Is Woburn Abbey and Gardens suitable for children?

Absolutely. The Gardens and grounds feature child-friendly areas, outdoor activities, and family-friendly events. The nearby Safari Park also offers additional entertainment for young visitors.

Additional Resources

Woburn Abbey and Gardens: A Majestic Blend of History, Architecture, and Natural Beauty

Nestled in the heart of Bedfordshire, England, Woburn Abbey and Gardens stands as a testament to centuries of aristocratic heritage, architectural grandeur, and meticulously curated landscapes. As one of the most iconic stately homes in the UK, Woburn offers visitors a unique journey through history, art, nature, and royal connections. This comprehensive guide aims to explore every facet of Woburn Abbey and Gardens, providing insights into its origins, architecture, art collections, gardens, and visitor experience.

Historical Significance of Woburn Abbey

Origins and Early History

- **Founding and Monastic Beginnings:** Originally established as an Augustinian priory in 1145, Woburn's roots extend back nearly nine centuries. The priory was founded by the de Cavaignac family, and its religious significance grew over the centuries.

- **Dissolution of the Monasteries:** Like many monastic establishments, Woburn was dissolved in 1538 during Henry VIII's reformation, leading to its transition from a religious site to a private estate.

Transformation into a Private Residence

- **The Bedford Family:** The estate was acquired by the Dukes of Bedford in the early 17th century. Sir John Russell, 4th Earl of Bedford, transformed the priory into a grand country house.
- **19th Century Expansion:** Under the 7th Duke of Bedford, the house was extensively rebuilt and expanded, incorporating neoclassical architectural elements designed by prominent architects like Henry Holland.

Architectural Evolution

- The current structure of Woburn Abbey reflects a mixture of architectural styles, predominantly neoclassical and Georgian influences.
- The estate has been continuously modified, adding wings, wings, and wings, making it a dynamic reflection of evolving tastes and needs of its aristocratic inhabitants.

Architectural Features of Woburn Abbey

Exterior Design and Facade

- The grand facade of Woburn Abbey showcases a balanced and symmetrical design, with imposing columns, elegant windows, and stone balustrades.
- The use of Portland stone gives it a classic, timeless appearance, fitting for a building of its stature.
- The estate is surrounded by expansive parkland, with pathways leading to various entrances emphasizing its grandeur.

Interior Highlights

- **State Rooms:** Visitors can explore lavishly decorated rooms, including the Saloon, Drawing Room, and Library, each filled with period furnishings, artworks, and intricate details.
- **Historical Artifacts:** The interior houses a rich collection of paintings, sculptures, and decorative arts accumulated over centuries.
- **Architectural Details:** Features such as ornate cornices, ceiling medallions, and period fireplaces add to the opulence of the interiors.

Modern Restoration and Preservation

- Ongoing restoration efforts ensure that Woburn Abbey maintains its structural integrity and aesthetic appeal.
- Conservation programs focus on preserving original features while integrating modern amenities for visitors and residents.

The Art Collections of Woburn Abbey

Paintings and Portraits

- Woburn boasts a remarkable collection of artworks, including works by renowned artists such as Van Dyck, Titian, and Gainsborough.
- The collection of portraits of the Bedford family reveals their history, influence, and connections with notable figures across Europe.

Furniture and Decorative Arts

- The estate features an extensive array of period furniture, from ornate chairs and tables to decorative tapestries.
- Silverware, porcelain, and decorative objects add layers of richness to the interior displays.

Royal Connections and Special Exhibitions

- Woburn has hosted exhibitions related to royal history, including displays of royal memorabilia and artifacts associated with the British monarchy.
- The estate's connections to royalty, including visits from Queen Elizabeth II, highlight its significance in British cultural history.

Woburn Gardens: A Botanical Wonderland

Design and Layout

- Woburn Gardens are renowned for their meticulous landscaping, combining formal gardens, woodland walks, and expansive lawns.
- The gardens are divided into several themed areas, each offering a unique experience:
 - The Italian Garden
 - The Chinese Garden
 - The Rose Garden
 - The Woodland Walks

Notable Features

- The Italian Garden: Characterized by classical statues, fountains, and symmetrical planting beds, it exudes Renaissance elegance.
- The Chinese Garden: Inspired by traditional Chinese landscaping, featuring pagodas, bridges, and exotic plants.
- The Walled Garden: A productive space with vegetable plots, glasshouses, and fruit trees, reflecting the estate's historical self-sufficiency.

Horticultural Highlights

- The gardens host a variety of plant species, including rare and exotic varieties.

- Seasonal displays, particularly in spring and summer, attract garden enthusiasts from across the country.
- The estate's commitment to sustainability and conservation ensures the preservation of its diverse flora.

Visitor Experience and Activities

Guided Tours and Self-Guided Exploration

- Visitors can choose from guided tours led by knowledgeable guides or explore independently using detailed maps and information sheets.
- Tours typically include highlights such as the State Rooms, art collections, and gardens.

Special Events and Exhibitions

- Throughout the year, Woburn hosts a variety of events:
- Christmas markets and festive displays
- Garden festivals and plant shows
- Historical reenactments and themed activities
- Art exhibitions and craft fairs

Family-Friendly Activities

- Woburn offers activities suitable for children and families, including:
- Adventure play areas
- Farm visits and animal encounters
- Educational workshops about history, art, and gardening

Dining and Shopping

- The estate features cafes and restaurants serving locally sourced cuisine.
- Gift shops offer souvenirs, local crafts, and garden-related products.

Practical Information for Visitors

Opening Hours and Ticketing

- Woburn Abbey and Gardens typically operate seasonally, with detailed schedules available on their official website.
- Ticket prices vary depending on the areas accessed and whether guided tours are included.

Accessibility and Facilities

- The estate strives to provide accessible routes and facilities for visitors with mobility challenges.
- Parking is ample, with provisions for disabled visitors.

Planning Your Visit

- Best times to visit are during spring and summer when gardens are in full bloom.
- Consider booking guided tours in advance for a richer experience.
- Check for special event dates and seasonal activities.

Conservation and Sustainability Efforts

Preserving Heritage

- Woburn Abbey invests heavily in conservation programs to preserve its artworks, architectural features, and gardens.
- Collaborations with heritage organizations ensure ongoing preservation.

Environmental Initiatives

- The estate promotes eco-friendly practices, including organic gardening, waste reduction, and renewable energy use.
- Initiatives aim to minimize environmental impact while maintaining the estate's beauty.

Woburn Abbey and Gardens offers an immersive experience that seamlessly blends history, art, and nature. Its rich heritage, stunning architecture, and beautifully curated gardens make it a must-visit destination for history enthusiasts, garden lovers, and casual tourists alike. With its ongoing efforts to preserve its cultural legacy and environmental sustainability, Woburn continues to inspire and delight visitors from around the world, standing as a proud symbol of Britain's aristocratic history and natural beauty.

Woburn Abbey And Gardens

woburn abbey and gardens: *Woburn Abbey* Keir Davidson, 2016 The park and gardens at Woburn Abbey tell a fascinating story, and one that illuminates the history of English landscaping from the sixteenth century to the present day. Drawing on the enormous quantity of material available in the Woburn archives, as well as the historic images and details preserved in the art in the Abbey itself, this book describes how the park and gardens developed, following wider trends in landscaping as well as the individual tastes of the successive dukes and duchesses. It also places the significant developments in the park and gardens in the context of the other gardens built at the time. The dukes (and before them the earls) of Bedford have been in possession of Woburn Abbey since 1540. Over the centuries, in all the major periods of English landscaping, gardens have been built at Woburn which not only reflect the styles of their times, but also throw light on the changing responses to the natural landscape which initiated those changes in style. Almost all of the important figures in English landscaping - from Isaac de Caus to George London and Henry Wise, Charles Bridgeman and Humphry Repton - worked for the Bedford family at one time or another. In our own time, a ten-year programme of restoration of Repton's Pleasure Gardens initiated by the present

Duchess is under way. When this is finished, in 2018, the result will be the most complete Repton pleasure grounds anywhere in the world.

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woburn abbey and gardens: The Gardens of England E. Adveno Brooke, 2023-04-21 Reprint of the original, first published in 1858. The publishing house Anatiposi publishes historical books as reprints. Due to their age, these books may have missing pages or inferior quality. Our aim is to preserve these books and make them available to the public so that they do not get lost.

woburn abbey and gardens: The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home Peter Mandler, 1997-01-01 Challenging the prevailing view of a modern English culture besotted with its history and aristocracy, Mandler portrays instead a continuously changing society where both intellectual and popular attitudes have only recently turned to admiration.

woburn abbey and gardens: Duchesses Jane Dismore, 2014-09-04 The title of 'duchess' has long been part of Britain's heritage. In 2011, it was brought up to date with the marriage of Prince William and Catherine Middleton, when the Queen conferred a number of titles on her grandson, among them Duke of Cambridge. Catherine joined that select group of the highest ranking duchesses, well-known royals whose husbands are dukes as members of the Royal Family. But another group of women sit just one notch down from royalty, at the top of the aristocratic tree with their dukes. These non-royal duchesses enjoy titles that were bestowed by monarchs for centuries but they are a dying breed: it is unlikely that any more non-royal dukedoms will be created. Here, for the first time, ten of Britain's non-royal duchesses speak candidly about their role and their lives in the 21st century, an era when privilege is an unpopular concept. Each duchess also selects her favourite ancestor in the role, providing a colourful gallery from the 17th to the 20th century. The parallel biographies provide a thought-provoking comparison for what does it mean to be a duchess in the 21st century? The results are often surprising and always fascinating. The title of 'duchess' has long been part of Britain's heritage.

woburn abbey and gardens: The Garden , 1906

woburn abbey and gardens: Kew Gardens Ascott Robert Hope Moncrieff, 1908

woburn abbey and gardens: Foreign Trends in American Gardens Raffaella Fabiani Giannetto, 2017-02-08 Foreign Trends in American Gardens addresses the influence of foreign, designed landscapes on the development of their American counterparts. Including essays from an array of significant scholars in landscape studies, this collection examines topics ranging from the importation of Western and Eastern styles of design and theoretical literature to the adaptation of specific plant types. As the variety of topics and influences discussed demonstrates, the essence of American gardens defies simple definition. Examining the translation, imitation, adaptation, and naturalization of stylistic trends and horticultural specimens into American gardens, the book also dwells on the juxtaposition of the foreign and the native. The volume's contributors consider the experiences both of immigrants, who contributed through their writing, planting, and design efforts to enhance the character of regional gardens, and of Americans, who traveled abroad and brought back with them a passion for naturalizing exotics for scientific as well as aesthetic reasons. The complexity of American gardens—their combination of the historic and the modern, and of foreign cultures and local values—is also their most distinctive characteristic.

woburn abbey and gardens: Plants and Gardens as Artefacts in Transcultural Contexts Minna Törmä, 2025-09-30 This edited volume explores the ways in which the object biography or object itinerary approach could be adapted to frame research on animate objects, such as plants and gardens in transcultural contexts. By treating these animate elements as 'objects' in the manner of artefacts and looking at their individual histories, we gain a more nuanced sense of how data accumulated, how new knowledge developed through printed texts and specimen collections, and how the creators of gardens or landscapes formed their collections. Chapters explore the shifts in meanings when objects from diverse origins meet in new cultural contexts where their new owners

create assemblages based on their perception of the world. The book will be of interest to scholars working in art history, material culture, and cultural geography.

woburn abbey and gardens: Seventeenth-century Water Gardens and the Birth of Modern Scientific thought in Oxford Stephen Wass, 2022-12-02 Based on a decade of archaeological investigation and historical research, this book tells the story of the Copes of Hanwell Castle in north Oxfordshire and the creation of a garden with links to the development of scientific thinking in Oxford in the late seventeenth century. New research using Robert Plot's Natural History of Oxfordshire as a starting point has uncovered details of a remarkable family and their rise and tragic downfall, their social circle, that included some great names in the development of early scientific thinking, and their garden that in effect became a place dedicated to the wonders of technology. The complex tale weaves together the activities of a royalist agent, Richard Allestree, a prodigious musician, Thomas Baltzar, John Claridge, a Hanwell Shepherd with a penchant for weather forecasting, and Sir Anthony Cope who in an atmosphere of secrecy and distrust began to gather together a community that eventually was named by Plot as The New Atlantis, a reference to a book published earlier in the century by Sir Francis Bacon in which he suggests a model for a Utopian science-focused society. The book also chronicles the program of archaeological excavation that has uncovered several unusual garden features and, most significantly of all, describes in detail the unique collection of seventeenth-century terracotta garden urns, an assemblage that is unparalleled in post-medieval archaeology. This collection was destroyed in a single episode of vandalism around 1675 and has been preserved in deeply buried deposits of mud and silt. Their analysis and reconstruction is opening new insights into the decorative schemes of seventeenth-century gardens. There is coverage of other gardens of the period and their surviving features as well as an examination of early science and how gardens impacted on its development in many ways.

woburn abbey and gardens: England's Magnificent Gardens Roderick Floud, 2021-06-15 An altogether different kind of book on English gardens—the first of its kind—a look at the history of England's magnificent gardens as a history of Britain itself, from the seventeenth-century gardens of Charles II to those of Prince Charles today. In this rich, revelatory history, Sir Roderick Floud, one of Britain's preeminent economic historians, writes that gardens have been created in Britain since Roman times but that their true growth began in the seventeenth century; by the eighteenth century, nurseries in London took up 100 acres, with ten million plants (!) that were worth more than all of the nurseries in France combined. Floud's book takes us through more than three centuries of English history as he writes of the kings, queens, and princes whose garden obsessions changed the landscape of England itself, from Stuart, Georgian, and Victorian England to today's Windsors. Here are William and Mary, who brought Dutch gardens and bulbs to Britain; William, who twice had his entire garden lowered in order to see the river from his apartments; and his successor, Queen Anne, who, like many others since, vowed to spend little on her gardens and instead spent millions. Floud also writes of Frederick, Prince of Wales, the founder of Kew Gardens, who spent more than \$40,000 on a single twenty-five-foot tulip tree for Carlton House; Queen Victoria, who built the largest, most advanced and most efficient kitchen garden in Britain; and Prince Charles, who created and designed the gardens of Highgrove, inspired by his boyhood memories of his grandmother's gardens. We see Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, who created a magnificent garden at Blenheim Palace, only to tear it apart and build a greater one; Deborah, Duchess of Devonshire, the savior of Chatsworth's 100-acre garden in the midst of its 35,000 acres; and the gardens of lesser mortals, among them Gertrude Jekyll and Vita Sackville-West, both notable garden designers and writers. We see the designers of royal estates—among them, Henry Wise, William Kent, Humphrey Repton, and the greatest of all English gardeners, "Capability" Brown, who created the 150-acre lake of Blenheim Palace, earned millions annually, and designed more than 170 parks, many still in existence today. We learn how gardening became a major catalyst for innovation (central heating came from experiments to heat greenhouses with hot-water pipes); how the new iron industry of industrializing Britain supplied a myriad of tools (mowers, pumps, and the boilers

that heated the greenhouses); and, finally, Floud explores how gardening became an enormous industry as well as an art form in Britain, and by the nineteenth century was unrivaled anywhere in the world.

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woburn abbey and gardens: The Gardener's Magazine and Register of Rural & Domestic Improvement , 1836

woburn abbey and gardens: Landscape Gardens Sarah Rutherford, 2017-09-15 The landscape garden is arguably Britain's greatest contribution to Western Art, establishing an artificial style of garden that has defined what we consider to be a 'natural environment'. This is the perfect introduction to the subject.

woburn abbey and gardens: *Garden History* Gordon Campbell, 2019-02-15 Gardens take many forms, and have a variety of functions. They can serve as spaces of peace and tranquility, a way to cultivate wildlife, or as places to develop agricultural resources. Globally, gardens have inspired, comforted, and sustained people from all walks of life, and since the Garden of Eden many iconic gardens have inspired great artists, poets, musicians, and writers. In this Very Short Introduction, Gordon Campbell embraces gardens in all their splendour, from parks, and fruit and vegetable gardens to ornamental gardens, and takes the reader on a globe-trotting historical journey through iconic and cultural signposts of gardens from different regions and traditions. Ranging from the gardens of ancient Persia to modern day allotments, he concludes by looking to the future of the garden in the age of global warming, and the adaptive spirit of human innovation. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

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